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**Reading Literature—Matters Still:
A Review of *Czytanie Literatury* [*Reading
Literature*], a journal of the Institute of
Polish Studies, University of Łódź**

Among the many Polish periodicals devoted to contemporary literature one can understandably observe an implicit urge to fashion critical endeavour in accordance with the latest trends in world philology. Still working to compensate for the period of blindness to the developments in the humanities that took place in the latter part of the twentieth century, Polish journals press for standards that comply with the internationally acknowledged levels of criticism. *Czytanie Literatury* [*Reading Literature*], a new academic journal affiliated with the Institute of Polish Studies, University of Łódź, seeks to rise to the challenge.

The first issue (1/2012), published at the beginning of this year, is devoted to reading a number of individual poems by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Czesław Miłosz. However, *Czytanie Literatury* breaks far beyond the boundaries of monograph discussions in that there are sections on the general tradition of criticism and the history of Polish philology in Łódź, and added to those are (always hearteningly welcome) papers on the reception of Polish literature abroad and a survey devoted to the question of the meaning of literature today, which is answered by renowned Polish scholars. Clearly, the first issue surprises with its staggering diversity, ranging from meticulous close readings to the more popular, though no less intriguing, discussion of the purpose of literature in today's world.

However, the particular strength of *Czytanie Literatury* lies in the translation section as seen in the first issue. Immediately after the series of essays dealing with Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz and a broader spectrum of literary tradition, there is a translation of the illustrious Stanford critic Marjorie Perloff's essay on T.S. Eliot, which comes from her crucial 2002 book *21st Century Modernism*. In the essay, Perloff argues that in his pre-*Waste Land* poems, Eliot created a highly complex constructivist poetics that would later be re-deployed in a more radical manner in the late-twentieth-century

lyrics of American poets such as Lyn Hejinian, Frank O'Hara and Charles Bornstein. However, placing Perloff's essay in the context of Polish poetry as it is investigated in *Czytanie Literaturoznawcze* makes as powerful a critical statement here as it did over a decade ago in the US. Perloff advises that contemporary critics re-approach the artful complexities inherent in modernist writing, for it is those complexities that continue to flourish in late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century poetics. Seeing Perloff's argument in the light of Polish literature, it becomes clear that a similar return to the writing of individual masters of the early- (to mid-) twentieth century holds a fruitful key to re-reading our contemporary scene of letters. Thus the illuminatingly detailed readings that comprise the first issue of *Czytanie Literaturoznawcze* seem to endeavour not only to resuscitate traditionally recognized authors (which hardly needs to be done) but also to let those "strong precursors" provide up-to-date discussions of literature with a new lease of life.

The fact that it is Iwaszkiewicz and Miłosz who come to open the inaugural issue of the journal derives from the editors' deliberate wish to emphasize close readings of individual texts, a tradition that holds strong in the Institute of Polish Studies at the University of Łódź, with an eye to reevaluating the existent views on those works. Through conscious application of theoretical principles and philological insight in its most lucid form, the analyses presented in the volume engage not only in the critical debates centred on individual writers but also in the wider development and significance of literary studies in the present-day world. In full awareness of the fact that literature does not exist outside the worldly spectrum as non-referential text-in-itself, the authors read the eminent works against their historical and cultural context, showing that, the temporal gap notwithstanding, literature retains a virtually inexhaustible staying power. Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz and a number of other writers emerge as vivid, lively figures whose literary output constitutes a vital part of the panorama of our world. Above all, it is hoped this tradition will be kept up in the forthcoming issues of *Czytanie Literaturoznawcze*. The contributors to the journal repeatedly demonstrate that reading matters more than ever inasmuch as within the textual world the finest space for understanding the variety that our civilization has compelled is opened.